

# The Athenian Mercury:

Saturday October 3. 1693.

Quest. 1. **W**hat's the Nature of a Charm? whether it be of that Effect as some suppose it to be? and whether 'tis lawful to make use of it?

Ans. We think the proper Notion of a Charm to be this, a Form of Words or Letters, repeated or written, whereby strange things are pretended to be done, beyond the ordinary Power of Nature.

A Form of Words, whereby we distinguish it from some Amulets, which pretend to much the same unaccountable Effects, tho' they receive the Power of producing such Effects from Planetary Influences, or what Gaffarel pleases. We add, a Form of Letters as well as Words, because the famous ABRACADABRA, and a great many more of 'em, seem rather a Combination of Letters than proper Words, (tho' We know some are of another mind) however We are sure that sometimes the twenty four Letters only have been made use of in Charms, only in such a determinate Order, without any Combination, We say [repeated or written, because this Custom has been as it shou'd seem from all Antiquity, to make use of both, tho' we believe Repeating it was the more ancient way. The remaining part of our Description will satisfy the remaining Queries — What Effects these Charms have, and whether or no they are lawful? as that before has partly done the first — What the Nature of it is? — We proceed therefore to the next Branch of it, [whereby strange things are pretended to be done] We say, pretended, because we are satisfy'd the Effects ascrib'd to 'em are very often in a proper sense only Lying-wonders, tho' we dare not say they are always so, being perswaded they have sometimes such Effects, tho' at others miss, as in Agues; whether the Devil in the Charm be too weak, or he whom some People fancy in the Ague, too strong (which is indeed the same) or however 'tis they order the Juggle between 'em: However these Effects, pretended to or perform'd, must be certainly beyond the ordinary Power of Nature — Ay, but says the Old Woman's Advocate, We don't know what the Power of Nature is, nor how far it extends; sure enough, but we know how far it does not; we must by Observation and Common Sense have some tolerable Notion of its ordinary and regular Operations: Nay, many things there are which we evidently perceive to be undoubted Effects of Natural Causes (under which we may perhaps yet rank the Operation of the Magnet) the Modus of whose Action would not only puzzle the Athenians, but all the Boys, the Caries and Aristotles that ever have been in Nature; and yet however all are agreed the Effects are Natural, or according to the settled regular Powers of Natural Agents: But so we might conclude, would it not be if we shou'd see a Man fly, (without any Virtue wings or Whirlwind) or if a Person shou'd be here this Moment and at York the next, or discover Thoughts and Actions at the greatest distance: Nor is it, in our Judgments, less unaccountable, that a few Nonsensical Words, hung about the Neck of a Child, who can't be assisted by Fancy or Imagination, shou'd yet have the strange Power of driving away a Disease, which yet We dare not say it has never done, being verily perswaded of the contrary, for this is not a thing of yesterday. The Jews dealt much in Charms, tho' severely forbidden by their Law, and not only their Rabbys, but Josephus himself tells us that Solomon himself was very well skill'd in them, and tells an odd Story of a Jew that wrought a Wonderful Feat by a Charm, before Vespasian the Emperor; tho' all that may be Natural, Solomon's Charms being only lawful Natural Magick, or understanding in the Natures and Virtues of Simples and Herbs, secret and unknown to other People. We will not say that Words repeated may have sometimes and in some Cases a very

strange and yet a Natural Operation, at least when sung, as all Charms anciently were, and as the very word often implies, and Words, or Tune, or both it must have been, with which David stopt the raging of Saul, which yet seems to have been Natural. But for the fore-mention'd written Charms, no such thing can be pleaded, and even under pretence of the other, we doubt not but Unlawful Incantation and Conjuratation have been used, otherwise the Wisdom of God would never have made an express Law against 'em, nay, Punish'd 'em with Death; nor can we see but that the words Charmer and Enchanter are well rendered from the Hebrew, in our Translation, and come up fully to the Notion which we and all Antiquity have conceiv'd of them. Nor can we think such Forms of Words as have their unaccountable Operations, especially written, owing (vitibly) to themselves only, not any peculiar Substance on which they may be written, or to which they are united, but that they receiv'd this Virtue from some cursed Original Compact with some delusive Demon, who yet seldom does a good turn but he repays an ill in its room. Besides, there may be a tacit and imply'd Submission to the Condition of the Original Contract, without which no Benefit to be obtain'd, (as when a Man takes a Shilling, he's Listed for a Souldier, at least it often costs him dear to get off again) and the uncertainty how far such a Contract may reach, and what Power it may give, would fright any Wise Man from venturing within its reach. However, this ill Effect is at least Necessary from such kind of Usages, that they are not only of ill Fame, and so wou'd not be us'd by a Good-man, but further take off the Mind both from a Dependence on the Supreme Being, and even from a Rational Use of those Auxiliary Natural Courses which he has dispos'd in the System of the World for the Benefit of his Creatures: For all which Reasons, we think repeated Charms at best doubtful, written Charms utterly unlawful.

Quest. 2. Whether this be't the Golden Age?

Ans. Not with us; We don't know what it may be with you.

Quest. 3. Whether 'tis possible for one Woman to Love another as Passionately and Constantly as if the Love were between different Sexes?

Ans. As Constantly they soon may, but as Passionately how shou'd they, unless they're of the Race of Tiresias?

Quest. 4. I'm a Gentlewoman of a small Fortune, and Married to a Man who was reported to have a good one, who I found had as little as I; he left me with a Charge of Children, and went to another Countrey, without making the least Provision either for them or me — Nor will his Friends look on us, and I've been already very chargeable and troublesome to my own, who are now grown as Cold as his: A Gentleman now Importunes me very much to be his Mistress, who I know Loves me passionately, and will provide for me and them. I desire your Advice what I were best to do, Whether I must lay my Children to the Parish, for Begging won't maintain us, and Stealing is as bad as Whoring? or how I ought to behave my self, for I can find no Mean, but either to yield to this Temptation, or see my Children starve? I know I ought not to do the least Evil that Good may come of it, but yet of two Evils we must choose the least: An Answer to this would both oblige and quiet, your, &c.

Ans. We acknowledge 'tis a sad Story, and wish it mayn't be true: But suppose it is, and all Circumstances fairly related, not to send the Querist back to former Volumes, because of the Importance of the Concern, (though we have therein reply'd to such Questi-

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ons as wou'd fully come up to the present difficulty ) we shall here endeavour to give her that satisfaction which she says she desires ; which we shall do very shortly, in the express words of the Command, *Thou shalt not Commit Adultery* : Now if she can find any Exception to that Rule in the whole Bible, she may venture on the desperate Course on which her Necessities are ready to thrust her ; but if not, as sure enough she can't, she must then take other Councils. But she and her Children are ready to starve — and the Martyrs were ready to be burnt — but did that make 'em deny their Saviour ? and in effect what is it less to live in a Course of wilfull sin ? It therefore neither her Relations nor her Husbands, on the Knowledge of her Necessities and Temptations will yet be so humane to give her Relief, she ought, how base soever it may appear, to make the Parish acquainted with her Burden, who by the Laws of the Land are bound to relieve her ; nor is this Choice near so Base as the other two that lye before her : Nay, she and they ought undoubtedly to beg, and to suffer the last Extremities, rather than at the Price of her Soul avoid 'em. That of two Evils we are to choose the least, is only true in Sufferings, not in Sins, for there we are to choose neither ; nor can any Person, without another sin, be reduc'd into a real Necessity of making such a Choice — as suppose a Man shou'd swear to kill another, here indeed he must choose one, and that the least evil, he must be Perjur'd rather than commit Murder. but certainly he brought himself into this Necessity. Now in the present Case there's no Necessity of a sin, for 'tis no Sin for her to Suffer her self, or even to let her Children suffer too, in the highest degree, if she has first done all she can to provide for 'em, rather than be guilty of so great a Crime in order to relieve 'em : Nay, shou'd she Generously and Piously refuse any such an Unlawful way of supplying her Necessities, 'tis very probable God's Providence wou'd find some way to provide an honest Subsistence for her and her Children, tho' none such at present appear.

Quest. 5. *I was contracted some Years since by the Consent of Parents on both sides, to a Lady of equal Fortune with my own, since which having a more Advantageous Offer, by her Parents command she cast me off, and was married to another ; However I find I still very passionately Love her, remaining unmarried, and resolving if her Husband dies, and I can prevail with her to accept me, to have Her or no Woman in the World. Pray your Judgment, Whether I'm guilty of a Crime in thus continuing to Love her ?*

Ans. If you are such a Platonick, that you can Love without Coveting, without desiring anothers Right, to be sure there's no harm in't ; but if you do, while she is so, or which is yet higher, desire his Death, that she may be yours ; you know who has said, *Thou shalt not Covet*, as well as, *Thou shalt not commit Adultery* ; read Bishop Sanderfons Case of Conscience, which comes very near this Matter.

Quest. 6. *About four years since, I came out of the Country, and was bound an Apprentice in London ; and partly by the harsh and rigid Disposition of my Master, partly by the great dislike I had to my Calling, was Discontented to that degree, that I found my self very miserable ; and seeing no way to get out of this Condition, resolv'd at last, tho' I ne're regarded it before, to devote my self to the severest and strictest Course of Piety, employing all the vacant opportunities I had either in Reading or Praying, and offering up constantly every day many fervent Ejaculations, till my whole Thoughts and Affections were at last so enamour'd on the Pleasure I found in Religion, that I grew by degrees careless in my Masters business, which he perceiving, shew'd himself more unkind to me than to any of my Fellows, telling me my Devotion wou'd do me no good, nor be acceptable in the sight of God, if I neglected his business ; on which resolving to Mind that and Religion too, I was by degrees reduc'd almost to my former Indifference as to Religion, neglecting that, and regarding only my Masters business. Now you'd infinitely oblige me*

*if you'd advise me, how I shall behave my self between these two Extreams, so as at once to please God and my Master ?*

Ans. Your Master was certainly so far in the right, that you ought by no means to neglect his Affairs, which are your lawful Calling, on any Pretence of Piety or Devotion. Nor on the other side shou'd you have run into the other extream, of which there cou'd be no Necessity, because you might have done both together. Our Advice in short is this, Redeem your Time, use daily Examination ( the Heads you'll find at the End of the Whole Duty of Man ) and weekly Sacraments, and undoubtedly you'll be able to discharge your Duty both towards God and Man with equal Success and Comfort.

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